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AUTHOR McLaughlin, Maureen
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ABSTRACT

Student-professor conferencing and students' increased self-reflection are two of the unexpected benefits of portfolio assessment. While self-reflection is a key component of meaningful conferencing, it is also clearly evinced in the students' rationale statements. These written reflections address the relevance of students' work to course outcomes. However, students are not accustomed to being asked to be reflective about course work. To assuage student anxiety about the reflective process, they should be reminded that reflection is part of everyday life. A literacy history simply details a person's reflections on his or her emergence into literacy, chronicling its development from earliest memory to present day. Such a process personalizes the learning experience. After using 100 literacy histories as a writing assignment, a professor arrived at the following findings: (1) All of the students chose to openly create their literacy histories; their reflections were documented with various artifacts from their past; (2) 96% of the students reported favorable memories of their emergence into literacy; (3) all of the students wrote about experiences with teachers--42% positive, 44% negative; and (4) 67% wrote about negative experiences with tracking. The implications of this study suggest that literacy histories encourage preservice teachers to reflect upon their past. Further, the performance-based aspect of this activity offers information that will help professors to improve curriculums. Contains eight references. (TB)

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Maureen McLaughlin
PA State System of Higher Education
East Stroudsburg University
Stroud 112--Reading Department
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301
E-Mail: mmclaugh@esu.edu

Literacy Histories of Pre-Service Teachers: The Effect of the Past on the Present

As the implementation of portfolio assessment in elementary and secondary classrooms increases (Cooper 1993; Vogt, McLaughlin, & Ruddell, 1993). Portfolio assessment is a dynamic, collaborative process that allows both teachers and students to experience assessment that emerges from instruction, which, in turn, is predicated upon the curriculum (McLaughlin & Kennedy, 1993; Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994). Utilizing this type of assessment in university methods classes has the added advantage of affording pre-service teachers the opportunity to experience as students a process they will experience with their own students. This also enhances preservice teacher ownership of assessment.

Student-professor conferencing and students' increased self-reflection are two of the great, unexpected benefits of portfolio assessment. While self-reflection is a key component of meaningful conferencing, it is also clearly evinced in the students' rationale statements. These written reflections address the relevance of students' work to course outcomes, and much as with other aspects of portfolio assessment, their initial development is an issue of concern. Students are simply not accustomed to being asked to be reflective about course work.

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In order to assuage student anxieties concerning the reflective process, I remind them that reflection is a part of everyday life. I then model by reflecting upon some aspect of my own life and sharing examples of others (i.e sports figures) who commonly engage in reflection. Next, I ask the students to utilize their background knowledge to reflect upon some aspect of their lives. Their reflections generally center on hobbies or special interests. They then describe their last experience, reflect on their performance, and set a new personal goal that will help them to perform better in the future. Once the students are comfortable with the concept, I invite them to transfer their reflectivity to their literacy history, a course outcome, or a particular indicator and its relevance to a course outcome.

A literacy history details a person's reflections on his/her emergence into literacy, chronicling its development form earliest memory to present day. Such a process personalizes the learning experience. In many cases, this leads to discussions with family members and peers, and allows students to become comfortable with the process of self-reflection because it is grounded in their own experiences. As Tierney, Carter, and Desai have noted: "Portfolios should be viewed as vehicles for student self-evaluation and assessment practices rooted in the life of the classroom and the world of the student" (1991, p.123).

This project puts students in touch with the factors that influence literacy development and offers them the opportunity to ponder the roles they may one day play in their own students' literacy development (Graves, 1990). Further, as students monitor their

engagement in the literacy process, they acknowledge its dynamic nature and set new goals for themselves.

As I began using Literacy histories in my courses, I had four questions:

(1)Would students choose to openly reflect upon past literacy experiences?

(2)What kinds of early literacy experiences had my students encountered?

(3)How did my students feel about interactions with their teachers?

(4)Would the students openly address educational issues with which they had negative experiences?

Findings:

The following responses emerged from a review of 100 literacy histories collected in reading methods classes during the spring and fall semesters, 1993:

1. 100% of the students chose to openly create their literacy histories. Their reflections were documented by items including interviews of family members; interviews with former teachers; physical evidence such as writing samples, favorite books.

2. 96% of the students reported favorable memories of their emergence into literacy. The remaining 4% mid-career students who simply couldn't remember and had no family members to interview. The chief memories of early literacy events were that (a)43% recorded episodes

of misplaced early scribblings (freshly painted and wallpapered rooms seem to have been viewed as extra large writing surfaces) and (b)87% reported being read to by adults.

3. 100% of the students wrote about experiences they had with teachers. 42% of the students recorded positive interactions with members of the teaching profession. 44% cited negative experiences. The remaining 14% did not detail their encounters with teachers enough to characterize them as being either positive or negative.

4. 67% of the students wrote about negative experiences with tracking. The remaining 33% did not address the tracking issue.

Implications and Recommendations:

1. The use of portfolio assessment in literacy methods courses promotes reflectivity.

2. Creating literacy histories encourages preservice teachers to reflect upon their past, as they are preparing to play active roles in the literacy histories of students of the future.

3. The openness with which preservice teachers create their literacy histories encourages openness in other course performances.

4. Preservice teachers have had positive and negative interactions with teachers and educational practices. The negative experiences have not, however, deterred these preservice teachers from pursuing careers in education.

5. The information gained from preservice teachers' literacy histories offers an authentic commentary on educational practices from the participants' perspective.

6. The performance nature of this activity invites us to use the information gained from preservice teachers' literacy histories to

continue to improve curricular, instructional, and assessment practices in education.

7. Preservice teachers should create personal histories in methods courses across the curriculum. Consider the benefits of such an activity in mathematics, science, or social studies.

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